

## Key Findings from Research to Inform Rhode Island's Health Benefits Exchange

March 6, 2013

### Background

Between December 2012 and January 2013, Lake Research Partners conducted 14 focus groups with Rhode Island residents, small employers (<100 employees), and healthcare providers, and conducted a statewide survey of 808 adults in Rhode Island to assess Rhode Islanders' opinions of the Health Benefits Exchange.<sup>1</sup> Overall, this research indicates that:

- Rhode Island residents, small employers, and healthcare providers are generally supportive of reforms to the state's healthcare system;
- They believe health coverage is too expensive, that there are too many uninsured people, and that care is often fragmented; and
- While there is a lack of awareness about the Health Benefits Exchange, once it is explained, the vast majority are interested in using it to find affordable health coverage.

Following are more detailed findings.

### Findings

#### A. Rhode Island Residents

**Most Rhode Island residents do not know about Rhode Island's Exchange, but once they learn about it, they are interested in using it.**

The vast majority (79%) of Rhode Islanders have not heard anything about Rhode Island creating its own health insurance exchange. After

Figure 1: "Rhode Island is creating a new way for individuals and small employers to get health insurance through its health insurance exchange. Individuals and small employers can use the exchange to compare health insurance plans and purchase the one that fits their needs and their budget. Through the exchange, you can see side-by-side comparisons of plan benefits and prices, and can find out if you qualify for a [discount/tax credit] to make insurance more affordable. If you needed insurance, how likely would you be to look into this new way for getting insurance?"

<i>Very likely</i>	61%
<i>Somewhat likely</i>	26%
<i>Not too likely</i>	5%
<i>Not at all likely</i>	7%
<i>Don't know</i>	1%

<sup>1</sup> The focus groups consisted of five to seven participants recruited from the Providence, Woonsocket, and South Kingstown areas. Rhode Island residents in the focus groups were diverse in terms of socioeconomic background, race, and ethnicity. One focus group was conducted in Spanish. The four small employer groups were segmented by firm size and whether or not they were not-for-profit organizations. For the four groups among providers, one group was conducted with each of the following: primary care physicians, ER doctors, specialists, and nurses. A total of n=808 adults in Rhode Island completed the statewide survey, which was conducted by telephone (n=566 landline, n=242 cell phone) from January 11 to January 17, 2013. On average, the survey took about 13 minutes to complete. The margin of error on the total results is 3.5%.

hearing a description of the Exchange, however, nearly nine in ten (87%) say they would be either very likely or somewhat likely to use it if they needed insurance. See Figure 1.

### Rhode Island residents respond positively to potential Exchange services.

When presented with nine potential features the Exchange might contain, most respondents said that the features would make them more likely to use the Exchange. Top features are providing help to consumers if they have a problem with their insurance company as well as help choosing a health plan that is right for them. See Table 1.

Table 1: If you needed insurance, how much more likely would you be to use the Exchange if it had this feature? (n=808)	"5" on a 1-5 Scale	"4" on a 1-5 Scale
Help if you have a problem with your insurance company	62%	19%
Help choosing a plan by phone, internet, or in-person	54%	21%
Help finding a healthcare provider or service	53%	21%
The Exchange as a negotiator with insurance companies	51%	23%
1 on 1 assistance from healthcare professionals	50%	23%
Small employers can set defined amounts for employees and employees can choose their plan	47%	24%
Discounts on health products like exercise equipment, supplements, etc.	47%	20%
Discounts on health-related services like gym memberships, etc.	47%	18%
Information and resources on health and healthy living	36%	25%

### A strong majority of Rhode Island residents are in favor of taking steps to reform the healthcare system.

Seven in ten (71%) respondents say they are in favor of making changes to the healthcare system in Rhode Island that would improve health care and health insurance for all residents. See Figure 2.

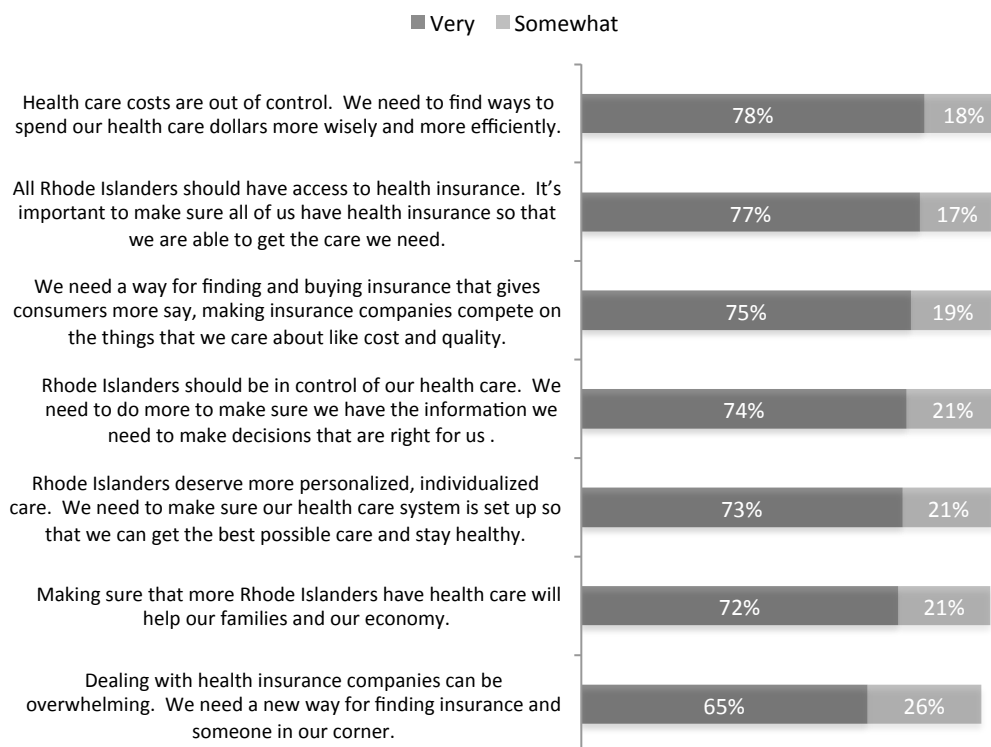
Figure 2: "As part of creating its own health insurance exchange, Rhode Island would also like to make a number of other changes to the health care system to improve health care and health insurance for all of its residents. These changes include rethinking the way patients get care; improving insurance options and making them more affordable; giving patients better healthcare information; and simplifying the process for getting insurance. From what you know now, are you in favor of making these types of changes to the healthcare system in Rhode Island?"

<i>Strongly favor</i>	41%
<i>Somewhat in favor</i>	30%
<i>Somewhat opposed</i>	9%
<i>Strongly opposed</i>	8%
<i>Don't know</i>	13%

**Top reasons for health reform among Rhode Island residents focus on addressing healthcare costs, making sure everyone has coverage, and giving customers more say in the insurance market.**

Survey respondents feel there are a number of important reasons why Rhode Island should work to improve its healthcare system. Their top reason has to do with health care costs being out of control (78% very important). See Figure 3.

Figure 3: Would you say this is a very important, somewhat important, not too important, or not important at all as a reason to change Rhode Island's healthcare system? (n=808)



## B. Small Employers

Small employers in the focus groups were open to healthcare reform in Rhode Island as well and were also generally supportive of the Exchange once they learned more about it. Key for small employers is understanding how they can work with their insurance brokers and still benefit from the Exchange. Other insights from the focus groups include:

**“[I] might [look into the Exchange] or might just go to the broker. It depends on the value of the site, whether it is actually better than the private quotes that we already get.”**

*- Small employer, Providence*

- ***While they like the idea of the Exchange, they are also skeptical.*** Many small employers feel the Exchange sounds too good to be true. Will it really have more affordable plans? Will it really be easy to use? Who will be running the Exchange?
- ***Small employers are driven by bottom-line concerns.*** The small employers in the focus groups were interested in using the Exchange if it can enable them to find lower cost health coverage. This will be their main motivation to use the Exchange or have their broker go to the Exchange. Currently, health coverage costs are hurting their bottom lines or are too high for these employers to afford for their employees.
- ***Nearly every small employer who participated in the research says they would at least look into the Exchange.*** They feel they have an obligation to their employees to at least look into it. They want to provide health coverage but costs prohibit many of them from doing so. They believe having coverage will make their employees healthier and more productive. If the Exchange will give them a way to afford coverage, then they will use it.

### ***C. Healthcare Providers***

Healthcare providers in the focus groups support reform in Rhode Island. They express strong interest in the Exchange and are willing to send their patients there to find health coverage. Importantly, they want to be involved in the reform process and to help with implementation. Following are other insights from providers:

**"[The Exchange] is going to allow for more of our patients to be insured... That's going to help considerably because a lot of the patients that we see don't come as often as they should or we only see them when they are critical because they don't have insurance and they won't go into a doctor or go to the emergency room. We don't want them to go to the emergency room. We want them to be followed by a family physician who can help them improve their health."**

*- Nurse, South Kingstown*

- ***Providers are frustrated with many aspects of the current system.*** They see care as being too fragmented; they are concerned about the number of uninsured people; and they think there is a lot of room for improvement.
- ***Healthcare providers are supportive of reform.*** They believe the system must change. But they are wary. Reforms have been discussed in the past and then have not happened.
- ***They are eager to join the conversation.*** They want to have a seat at the table to discuss reform ideas and help with implementation. They feel they are more likely to support the specific reform ideas if they have a hand in shaping them.
- ***They are enthused about the Exchange.*** They are willing to help promote the Exchange, but feel they need to learn more details about how it will actually work and who will be involved in running it.

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